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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of policy at the college level (either mandated by the school or optional) of reviewing their instructors through student ratings and the student perceptions of their own ratings. The sample included 954 students in "teachers colleges" in Taiwan during the 1999 spring semester. The results indicate some differences between perceptions of "required students," those required to evaluate, and "optional students," those who chose the afforded option to evaluate, are statistically significant, although some are not. The significant differences included the purposes, concerns, components, and negative effects of the student ratings. There was no statistical mean difference in the application of ratings across the two groups, and both groups had generally positive perceptions of the process of student ratings. Regardless of whether the school policy mandates the evaluation or not, students agreed with the following: (1) all instructors should accept the student ratings; (2) the current students should be the raters; (3) faculty evaluation committees should be responsible for developing the evaluation form; (4) a department-wide form should be used instead of a college-wide evaluation form; (5) the best time to implement student ratings is at the end of the semester; (6) the evaluation process may take place in the classroom; and (7) the classroom chairman should be the person to take charge of the evaluation. (Contains 4 tables and 49 references.) (Author/SLD)

Student Perceptions of Student Ratings: Does School Policy Really Matter?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of policy at the college level (either mandated by the school or optional) of reviewing their instructors through student ratings, and the student perceptions of their own ratings. The sample included 954 students in "teachers colleges" in the country of Taiwan, during the 1999 spring semester. The results indicate some perceptions between "required students"--those required to evaluate, and "optional students"--those who chose the afforded option to evaluate, are statistically significant. Moreover, they are different, though some of them are not. The significant parts include the purposes, concerns, components, and negative effects of the student ratings. There is no statistical mean difference on the application of ratings across the two groups. Both have generally positive perceptions of the process of student ratings. Regardless of whether the school policy mandates the evaluation or not, students agree with the following: (1) all instructors should accept the student ratings, (2) the current students should be the raters, (3) faculty evaluation committees should be responsible for developing the evaluation form, (4) instead of a college-wide evaluation form, a department-wide evaluation form should be used for student ratings, (5) the best time to implement student ratings is at the end of the semester, (6) the evaluation process may take place in the classroom, and (7) the classroom chairman should be the person to take charge of the evaluation.

Key words: Student Ratings, Faculty Evaluation, College Teaching, Teachers College

Student Perceptions of Student Ratings: Does School Policy Really Matter?

Introduction

Student ratings (or called student evaluations) have been officially employed by institutions of higher education since 1927. Wagenaar (1995) stated that well over 90 percent of schools use student ratings for assessing the teaching staff. Evidence from many other studies also indicates that most universities in North America use student ratings of instruction as part of their evaluation of teaching effectiveness (d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997). Seldin (1993) found that student ratings were used as a component of faculty evaluation systems by more than 86% of the 600 humanities colleges surveyed. Calderon, Gabbin, and Green (1995) found that close to 95 percent of accounting departments use student ratings of instruction and as many as 18% rely exclusively on student ratings in evaluating faculty teaching performance. As Wilson (1998) predicted, all of the colleges would take student ratings of instruction as part of "teaching quality" for their faculty.

Student ratings of instruction are usually used to provide (1) formative feedback to faculty for improving teaching, course content and structure; (2) a summary measure of teaching effectiveness for promotion and tenure decisions; and (3) information to students for the selection of courses and teachers (Marsh & Roche, 1993). Why are student ratings commonly used for faculty evaluations? Some realistic reasons for this are as follows, (1) (1) Student raters have closely and recently observed a number of teachers. (2) Students' frank reactions can be a beneficial aid in refining course structure and teaching styles. (3)

Student ratings are more objective than other approaches such as administrator evaluations, peer evaluation, self-rating, and classroom visitation evaluation. (4) The position of student ratings is unique in capacity to indicate how students think and feel. (5) Students are a convenient source of rating as well (Arreola, 1995; Peterson, 1995).

Some researchers have explained that the advent of student consumerism and accountability issues in the last two decades has propelled research in student ratings to new heights (Benson & Lewis, 1994; Van Patten, 1994). Research on student ratings of instruction often examines the issues such as development and validity of an evaluation instrument (e.g., Marsh, 1987), the validity (e.g., Cohen, 1981), and reliability (e.g., Feldman, 1977) of student ratings in measuring teaching effectiveness, and the potential bias of student ratings (e.g., Centra & Gaubatz, 2000; Chang, 2000; Feldman, 1993). With considerable consistency, research reveals elements of instructor behavior which student's rate to be exceedingly important. With varying labels and weights depending upon the individual studies, these elements include the factors of learning value, instructor enthusiasm, organization and clarity of explanation, individual rapport, group interaction, ability to stimulate student interest and learning, breadth of coverage of material, and overall fairness in examinations, grading, assignments, and workload difficulty.

However, implicit in all of the mentioned literature is the assumption that students answer the instruments honestly and willingly. Relatively few studies have attempted to ask students either how conscientiously they respond to the questions, or how seriously they take the whole evaluation process. In the handful of articles that have addressed the issue, the surveyed students have indicated that both the evaluation process is important and that students are qualified to rate the their professors. However, students are not optimistic

about the overall weight put by administrators and faculty on student opinions (Abbott, Wulff, Nyquist, Ropp, & Hess, 1990; Marlin, 1987).

Like western universities, most colleges and universities in Taiwan have asked for feedback from students in rating their quality of the instruction in the classroom. Of all the colleges in Taiwan more than 80% have officially employed student ratings of instruction. This author has discovered that despite student ratings being one of the most common features of faculty evaluation systems, only five of the nine Taiwanese Teacher Colleges have mandated policy requiring faculty to implement a student rating in their courses, and, the remaining schools offer merely optional student ratings to departments resulting mainly from past elements of faculty opposition. Consistently, programs in required-policy teacher college faculty are less resisted than those in optional policy faculties. That is, the institutional evaluation climate in schools with required policy is higher than schools with optional policy. This has become the motivation of this study. As the literature has indicated, students are not too optimistic about the overall weight put by administrators and faculty on their opinion. Does the mandatory or required policy for student ratings have an effect on student perceptions of student ratings? Is there any difference between students in required policy (the required students) and students in optional policy (the optional students) regarding to perceptions of student ratings?

Literature Review

Student Perceptions

Student ratings of instruction have traditionally served two functions--as formative and summative measurements of teaching. One formative use of studied student ratings

serves as a source of feedback to instructors who wish to modify their teaching practices. Many studies examine the usefulness of student ratings in improving teaching performance (Marsh & Roche, 1993; Theall & Franklin, 1991). Student ratings are used to improve course content, format, and structure. Studies that examine the course improvement aspect of teaching evaluations include Driscoll and Goodwin (1979) and Simpson (1995).

The summative function of studied student ratings provide information for administrations in decisions regarding their faculty. In fact, most colleges and universities studied attach great importance to teaching performance in regards to tenure, promotion, and pay raise decisions (Cashin & Downey, 1992; Centra, 1994). This summative function of teaching evaluation may also provide information for student selection of preferred instructors and course sections (Marsh & Roche, 1993). This function though, had been a subject of controversy and not yet widely adopted by many colleges and universities. In the United States, teaching evaluations have been publicly available information in state-supported institutions under the Freedom of Information Act. Studied student groups at some universities routinely request this data and disseminate it to the student body (Chen & Leon, 1998).

Since student ratings are used as the primary measure of teaching effectiveness, the active participation and meaningful input of students are crucial factors in the success of a teaching evaluation system. Important studies have observed a significant linkage between student perceptions of student ratings and the success of a teaching evaluation system (Douglas & Carroll, 1987; Marsh, 1987; Tom, Swanson, & Abbott, 1990). And few studies have made as their primary aim an attempt to look at the wider lens assessment of student perspectives on the seriousness of the evaluations, as well as investigate the general

satisfaction in the climate of the educational institution. Abbott, Wulff, Nyquist, Ropp, and Hess (1990) examine student satisfaction with the evaluation process and emphasize the importance of student satisfaction since this may affect a students' willingness to participate. Abbott and his colleagues show that students often complain about the frequency with which they are asked to fill out rating forms and the degree to which faculty are perceived to adjust their courses in response to student feedback. Brandenburg, Braskamp, and Ory (1979) are particularly concerned about the possible overuse of student rating forms, and question whether students take the evaluations seriously.

Marlin (1987) found that over half of the students sampled state that they took sufficient time and attempted to be fair and accurate in the ratings of their instructors. Marlin, however, also states three key findings, (1) students tend to view evaluations as a "vent to let off student steam" (2) students often complain that faculty and administrators pay scant attention to student opinions, and (3) teacher behavior is not altered based on comments from the student rating forms. Jacobs (1987) also reported that 40% of the students responding to her survey said that they have heard of students plotting to get back at an instructor by collectively giving lower ratings. An overwhelming majority of the students reported that they had never heard of an instructor who tried to manipulate students into giving higher ratings (Wachtel, 1998).

Issues for Student Ratings

To investigate the effects of school policy on student perceptions of student ratings, this study focuses on the school policy that provides student ratings as an option or requirement for faculty, and the important issues of student ratings. Some key issues of

student ratings have been discussed by various research studies, such student rating purposes (e.g., Spencer, 1994), the concerns about ratings (e.g., Abbott, et. al, 1990), the components of teaching effectiveness, the negative effect of student ratings (e.g., Wachtel, 1998), the application of student ratings (e.g. O, 1996), and the procedures of student ratings (e.g., Centra, 1981).

This study takes the above issues as dependent variables and school policy as the independent variable. It is assumed that schools with required policy for student ratings have a more mandatory evaluation climate than those with the optional policy. The differences in school policies for student ratings might lead to significant differences in regard to student perceptions of student ratings. Therefore, it could reasonably be speculated that required students and optional students may stand on different positions for these important issues of student ratings.

Conceptual Framework

The current study takes a structural-functional approach. Colleges possess variable climates for the teaching and evaluation activities of the faculty. These different climates influence both faculty and students within the context of their teaching and learning activities. Student learning and achievement, student growth and satisfaction, student development and self-esteem are all potentially important outcomes of the teaching and evaluation activities of the schools. Different authors have selected different measures to represent these different evaluation activities. And as noted above, student ratings were used as the primary measure of teaching effectiveness, and active participation as well as meaningful input from students are critical factors in the success of a teaching evaluation

system (Chen & Leon, 1998). Besides, Feldman (1987) in his meta-analysis examined the many studies using student ratings as a reflection of teaching effectiveness.

The conceptual framework for this research was derived from the literature on academic organizations and indicates the existence of school cultures or climates (Cameron & Ettington, 1988). Kolb (1988) claimed that organizational environments can produce substantially variable influences on student development. In academic organizations, "subunit" effects may be more powerful than the larger organizational culture. Though Ewell (1989) found that overall institutional culture is not significantly associated with student achievement, and a number of other studies concerned with college impact have suggested the importance of sub-environments such the effects of college departments. Smart's (1985) study of student self-esteem, for example, found that the academic sub-environments within campuses are more strongly associated with student development than are the general campus environments. Similarly, in their study of campus climate, Moran and Volkwein (1988) found that subunit effects were more significant than organizational effects. Although organizational-level climate did distinguish campuses from one another in their study, academic departments accounted for the largest proportion of variance in the climate.

Student perceptions of student ratings result from a variety of campus and student individual background influences. Though student individual backgrounds, such as gender, GPA, major, year in school, motivation, etc., may contribute to the student perceptions of student ratings, these variables are not the focus of the current investigation. This study views the school policy as an important component in the student experience and seeks to

measure the relationship between organizational evaluation climates and student perceptions of students enrolled in those organizations.

Method

The Data

The selected subjects were full time, on campus, undergraduate and graduate students from nine Taiwanese Teacher Colleges enrolled during the Spring semester of 1999. The questionnaire, with a cover letter explaining its purpose, was mailed to a systematic sample of 120 students from each college and Table 1 describes the responses received.

Table 1. Biographic Data for Student Sample from Each of Nine Teachers Colleges

Var	School	Sch1	Sch2	Sch3	Sch4	Sch5	Sch6	Sch7	Sch8	Sch9	Total	% of group
School policy	Required	0	107	102	0	77	0	0	106	120	512	53.7
	Optional	103	0	0	105	0	120	114	0	0	442	46.3
Gender	Male	17	25	20	31	19	26	29	42	37	246	26.7%
	Female	63	80	81	74	58	97	79	56	87	675	73.3%
Year in School	Freshman	10	13	10	18	21	58	28	30	38	226	24.6%
	Sophomore	19	48	33	38	20	40	66	24	30	318	34.6%
	Junior	18	26	29	31	34	11	13	21	31	214	23.3%
	Senior	4	11	30	10	2	6	2	11	20	96	10.5%
	Graduate	20	5	0	8	0	10	0	15	6	64	7.0%
Total	*N*	103	107	102	105	77	120	114	106	120	954	
	%	10.8%	11.2%	10.7%	11.0%	8.1%	12.6%	11.9%	11.1%	12.6%	100.0%	

Note. The number of usable questionnaires is 954. Due to missing data, the valid sample size for the student gender is 922, the valid sample size for student year in school is 918.

An overall response rate was 89.0% ($N = 961$). Due to missing data, the rate of usable questionnaires was further reduced to 88.3% ($N = 954$) with 512 (53.7%) required students and 442 (46.3%) optional students. These 954 student members consisted of 226 (24.6%) freshmen, 318 (34.6%) sophomores, 214 (23.3%) juniors, 96 (10.5%) seniors, and 64 (7.0%) graduate students.

The Measurements

The data was collected by a 42-item survey questionnaire entitled "Questionnaire for Student Perceptions of Student Ratings." The questionnaire consisted of four parts. Part I contained six demographic items that related to school policy, student gender, academic level, GPA, major, and the experience of completing a student rating form. Part II had 33 items rated on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from "strongly agree" (5-points) to "strongly disagree" (1-point). It includes five issues (Items 1 - 32) and an overall question item (Item 33). The five issues concern the purposes of student ratings (Items 1 - 7), the concerns about student ratings (Items 8 -11), the components of student ratings (Items 12 - 20), the negatives of student ratings (Items 21 - 26), and the application of student ratings (Items 27 - 32). Item 33 asks for an overall agreement of student ratings.

Part III included a series of procedure questions (Items 34 - 40), such as who should be rated, who should be raters, who should be responsible to develop the evaluation form, how should the evaluation form be designed, when does the evaluation process take place, and where should the evaluation process take place?

Part IV has two open-ended questions concerning student rating comments about the student ratings of faculty teaching (Due to the limitation of the paper, the result of Part IV will not be discussed in this paper).

Analytic Strategy

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program is utilized to tabulate data and compute the statistical tests. Descriptive data is provided to assist with the

interpretation of the structure of the relationship between student perceptions of student ratings and the school policy. The mean, standard deviation for required-policy and optional-policy student responses to each item in Part II of the survey questionnaire is accordingly computed and the percentage for each item in Part III is also calculated for each group.

For the purpose of interpreting the pattern of responses to those Likert-scale items (Items 1 to 33), the mean of each item for the required students and optional students is computed and divided into three levels: disagreement, neutral, and agreement. Thus, a mean below 2.49 was treated as a level of disagreement, a mean between 2.50 to 3.49 as a level of neutral, and a mean above 3.50 as a level of agreement.

Since the sample sizes for both required students ($N_{required}$= 512) and optional students ($N_{optional}$ = 442) are large, a parametric statistic method (independent *t* test) instead of a non-parametric test is applied for testing the mean difference in opinion between the required students and optional students on each of the first 33 items. Items in Part III, Items 34 through 40, were analyzed with the Chi-squared test of homogeneity in order to examine the difference in the perceptions of procedure for student ratings between the required students and optional students.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation, and mean differences for the required and optional student responses to Items 1 to 33. The majority of the ratings are in the 2.77-4.11 and 2.75-4.14 ranges for respectively, the required and optional students. It appears, therefore, that both groups of students stand on agreement or neutral positions for most of the items. The first two largest mean differences between the required and optional students

are 0.23 with Item 11, "Administrators care about the student ratings", and 0.21 with Item 9, "Professors care about the student ratings". The smallest mean difference is -0.01 with Item13, "Teaching content and material should be a component of rating".

Table 2 also presents the results of independent *t* tests to test the differences in opinion between these two group of students. Table 3 presents a ranked order by mean for the items of each issue according to policy. The following discussion is based on Table 2 and Table3.

Purposes of the Ratings

Among the seven items concerned with purposes of student ratings, both required and optional students agree with five of them: "improving teaching", "providing a chance for democratic practices of instructors and students", "enhancing the communication between instructors and students", "reflecting teaching effectiveness", and "providing a chance for self-evaluation on behalf of the instructor." Both required and optional students stand on a neutral position for Item 5, "providing reference for faculty promotion" and Item 6, "increasing student learning motivation".

In the required group, the highest mean is 3.97 for Item 7, "providing a chance for teacher self-evaluation", while the lowest mean is 3.24 for Item 5, "providing reference for faculty promotion." Similarly, in the optional group, the highest mean is 4.08 for Item 7, while the lowest mean is 3.27 for Item 5. As shown in Table 3, the required and optional students' perceptions of the rank of the seven purposes of student ratings have a perfectly positive association ($r_{sp} = 1.000, p < .01$).

The mean scores of optional student opinion are significantly higher than those of required student opinion on the following items: (1) improving teaching, (2) providing a

chance for democratic practices of instructors, (3) enhancing the communication between instructor and students, (4) reflecting teaching effectiveness, and (5) providing a chance for teacher self-evaluation. It is obvious that the optional students feel more positive on these five purposes of student ratings than the required students, although both of them agree with the five items.

Concerns about the Ratings

Of the four items relating to concerns about the ratings, both required and optional students agree with only Item 8, "I care about the student ratings". The required and optional students stand on a neutral position for the rest of three items. The lowest means are, respectively, 3.06 and 2.83 for Item 11, "administrators care about the ratings." In the required group, the four items in the ranking order by mean, from highest to lowest, are (1) I care about the student ratings, (2) professors care about the student ratings, (3) students care about the student ratings, and (4) administrators care about the student ratings. In the optional group, the ranks of four items from the highest to lowest are (1) I care about the student ratings, (2) students care about the student ratings, (3) professors care about the student ratings, and (4) administrators care about the student ratings.

The mean scores of required student opinions are significantly higher than those of optional student opinions on the following two items: (1) professors care about student ratings, and (2) administrators care about the student ratings. On the other hand, the optional student opinion is significantly higher than those of required students' on (1) I care about the student ratings, and (2) students care about the student ratings. Surely students in the required policy system feel stronger about their professors and administrators concern

over the student ratings but they are less optimistic for student concern and their own. This may be due, in part, to a "you-must-do-it" atmosphere created by the required policy itself. Some of students may therefore, be simply unwilling to partake in the ratings. Students in the optional system feel that their teachers and administrators are not as concerned as they should due to optional nature of the evaluation.

Components of the ratings

Of the nine items concerned with the components of student ratings, both required and optional groups consider the following eight components necessary to the evaluation form: personal characteristics of the instructor, teaching content and material, relationship between the instructor and students, the teaching skills and method, learning assessment, student self-evaluation, instructor overall rating, and the course overall rating. The only item which these two groups stand in neutral position over, is Item 18, "student learning achievement". In other words, students do not think it is necessary to cover their learning achievement in their faculty evaluations. The required students are significantly higher than the optional students on this item. Another item, where the optional students are significantly higher than the required students, is Item 19, "Instructor overall ratings".

As shown in Table 3, required and optional students' perceptions of the rank of the nine components of student ratings are highly and positively correlated ($r_{sp} = 0.971, p < .01$). In the required group, the three most important components are (1) teaching skills and method, (2.5) instructor overall rating, (2.5) and teaching content and material. In the optional group, the three most important components are (1) the overall rating of the instructor, (2) teaching skills and method, and (3) teaching content and material. It should

be noted in the required group, that the overall rating of the instructor, and teaching content and material, tie in the ranking order by their mean. It should also be noted in the ranking relationship between instructor, instructor personal characteristics, and student learning achievement, the required and optional groups both agree what they consider the three least important items.

The Negative Effect of Ratings

As for the negative effect of ratings, both required and optional students agree only with Item 22, "good teaching may not be rated high," and further, both groups stand neutral for the rest of the items. The fact both groups notice that good teaching may not be rated high is confirmed by the finding by Stevens (1978). In a survey of 226 faculty and 572 students in a southwestern university, Stevens found that faculty and students were undecided as to whether student ratings actually measured teacher effectiveness. Both studies indicate that the validity of student ratings is still an issue or problem that needs to be dealt with. However, it is not only a problem with student ratings, but also a problem for all evaluation processes everywhere. Since it is unavoidable to involve personal judgment or preferences in the evaluation process, the result of evaluation (including student ratings) may be affected by personal values. This might be the reason why faculty, in personal discussions, have reservations concerning the use of student ratings and would like to have other evaluation systems as well (Jacobs, 1987).

The mean scores of required student opinions are significantly higher than those of optional student opinions on the topic of "reducing teacher energy in teaching" and

"following rating results may not be consistent". It seems that required students believe more that the student ratings will bring some negative effects on the teaching.

Required and optional student perceptions on the ranking of the six components of the negative effect of student ratings have a perfectly positive association (r_{sp} =1.000, $p < .01$). The two most important components are (1) good teaching may not be indicated or reflected in the ratings, and (2) following the rating results may not be consistent. The two least effective components according to the two groups are reducing the course requirements and influencing the relationship between teacher and the students.

The Application of the Ratings

Among six items with application of ratings, both required and optional students agree with four items: "for feedback to individual instructor", "for teacher teaching awards", "for student course selection", and "for job contract". Both groups stand neutral on "for promotion", and "to publish the result in school journal". There is no significant difference between these two groups on the six items.

Required and optional students' perceptions of the rank of the six components of application of ratings have a perfectly positive association (r_{sp} =1.000, $p < .01$). The two most important components are "for feedback to individual instructor" and "for teacher teaching awards".

Overall Agreement

Both required and optional students agree with the implement of written student ratings of instruction. Although the mean score of required is 0.03 lower than that of optional students, the difference is not statistically significant.

Table 2. The Summary of Independent *t* Test for Student in Required Policy and Student in Optional Policy Regarding to Perceptions of Student Ratings (Based on Items 1 to 33) ($N_{required}$ = 512, $N_{optional}$ = 442)

Item #	Issues and item contents	*Required*		*Optional*		*Comparison*	
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M diff.*	*t*
The purpose of the ratings							
1	To improve the instruction.	3.85	0.88	4.00	0.73	-0.15	-2.780**
2	Providing an opportunity for democratic practices on behalf of instructors and students.	3.91	0.73	4.01	0.62	-0.10	-2.141**
3	Enhancing the communication between instructor and student	3.81	0.84	3.98	0.65	-0.17	-3.452**
4	Reflect teaching effectiveness	3.70	0.93	3.84	0.80	-0.14	-2.321*
5	Provide references for faculty promotion	3.24	1.02	3.27	0.98	-0.03	-0.444
6	Increasing the student motivation to learn	3.28	0.96	3.32	0.87	-0.04	0.549
7	Providing an opportunity for the self-evaluation of the instructor.	3.97	0.74	4.08	0.54	-0.11	-2.377*
The importance of the ratings							
8	I care about the student ratings.	3.63	0.92	3.78	0.74	-0.15	-2.529*
9	Professors care about the student ratings.	3.15	1.07	2.94	1.01	0.21	3.084**
10	Students care about the student ratings.	3.14	0.98	3.31	0.89	-0.17	-2.676**
11	Administrators care about the student ratings.	3.06	1.07	2.83	1.00	0.23	3.214**
The components of the ratings							
12	The personal characteristics of the instructor.	3.77	0.76	3.75	0.76	0.02	0.450
13	The teaching content and course materials.	4.09	0.57	4.10	0.45	-0.01	-0.062
14	The relationship between the instructor and the students.	3.82	0.79	3.77	0.72	0.05	0.983
15	Teaching skills and teaching method.	4.11	0.58	4.14	0.48	-0.03	-.0774
16	Learning assessment.	3.97	0.68	3.93	0.58	0.04	0.991
17	Student self-evaluation.	3.90	0.66	3.86	0.62	0.04	0.961
18	Student learning achievements.	3.32	0.95	3.17	0.87	0.15	2.515*
19	The overall rating of the instructor.	4.09	0.62	4.16	0.47	-0.07	-2.081*
20	The overall rating of the course.	4.09	0.62	4.07	0.51	0.02	-1.539
The negative effect of ratings							
21	Tension for the instructor and the student is a result.	3.16	1.02	3.07	0.99	0.09	1.321
22	Good teaching may not be indicated or reflected in the ratings.	3.84	0.88	3.87	0.86	-0.03	-.0509
23	Teacher energy is reduced.	3.03	1.01	2.88	1.00	0.15	2.138*
24	Following the rating results may not be consistent.	3.31	0.97	3.13	1.00	0.18	2.710*
25	Reduction of course requirements.	2.77	0.95	2.75	0.93	0.02	0.385
26	Poorly influences the relationship between teachers and students.	2.86	0.94	2.77	0.90	0.09	1.473
The application and usage of the ratings							
27	To provide a source of feedback to individual instructors.	3.91	0.74	3.96	0.67	-0.05	-1.010
28	Useful toward the teacher and teaching awards.	3.70	0.89	3.72	0.83	-0.02	-0.366
29	For the administrative evaluation of job contracts.	3.57	0.93	3.55	0.87	-0.02	0.306
30	For the administrative evaluation of promotions.	3.35	0.92	3.33	0.90	-0.02	-0.283
31	For students to select their courses and instructors.	3.65	0.88	3.69	0.84	-0.04	-0.683
32	To be published in school journals.	3.09	1.07	3.01	1.04	0.08	1.060
33	**Overall agreement**	4.28	0.75	4.31	0.67	-0.03	-0.734

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *M diff.* = mean difference.

Table 3. Ranking Order by Mean for Required and Optional Students' Responses to Items 1-32 ($N_{required}$ = 512, $N_{optional}$ = 442)

Item #	Issues and item content	*Required*		*Optional*		
		M	*Rank*	*M*	*Rank*	r_{sp}
Purpose of the rating						
7	Providing a chance for teacher self-evaluation	3.97	1	4.08	1	
2	Providing a chance for democracy practice for instructor and student	3.91	2	4.01	2	
1	Improving teaching	3.85	3	4.00	3	
3	Enhancing the communication between instructor and student	3.81	4	3.98	4	1.000**
4	Reflecting teaching effectiveness	3.70	5	3.84	5	
6	Increasing student learning motivation	3.28	6	3.32	6	
5	Providing reference for faculty promotion	3.24	7	3.27	7	
Importance of ratings						
8	I care about the student ratings	3.63	1	3.78	1	
9	Professors care about the student ratings	3.15	2	2.94	3	0.800
10	Students care about the student ratings	3.14	3	3.31	2	
11	Administrators care about the student ratings	3.06	4	2.83	4	
Component of ratings						
15	Teaching skills and method	4.11	1	4.14	2	
19	Instructor overall rating	4.09	2.5	4.16	1	
13	Teaching content and material	4.09	2.5	4.10	3	
20	Course overall rating	4.09	4	4.07	4	
16	Learning assessment	3.97	5	3.93	5	0.971**
17	Student self-evaluation	3.90	6	3.86	6	
14	Relationship between instructor and student	3.82	7	3.77	7	
12	Instructor personal characteristics	3.77	8	3.75	8	
18	Student learning achievement	3.32	9	3.17	9	
Negative effect of ratings						
22	Good-teaching may not be rated high	3.84	1	3.87	1	
24	Ratings results may not be consistent to follow	3.31	2	3.13	2	
21	Bringing tension to instructor and student	3.16	3	3.07	3	1.000**
23	Reducing teacher energy in teaching	3.03	4	2.88	4	
26	Influencing the relationship between teacher and student	2.86	5	2.77	5	
25	Reducing course requirements	2.77	6	2.75	6	
Application and usage of ratings						
27	For feedback to individual instructor	3.91	1	3.96	1	
28	For teacher teaching awards	3.70	2	3.72	2	
31	For student course selection	3.65	3	3.69	3	1.000**
29	For job contract	3.57	4	3.55	4	
30	For promotion	3.35	5	3.33	5	
32	To publish in school journal	3.09	6	3.01	6	

Note. ** $p < .01$; r_{sp} = Spearman rank correlation. Instructor overall rating and teaching content and material tied in the required group.

The process of student ratings

Who should be rated? As Table 4 indicates, there exists statistically significant disagreement in opinion between the required and optional students over this issue. What appears to account for the significant difference of opinion on this issue is that the amount of "all faculty" selected by optional students (85.1%) is not nearly as great as it is for required students (92.9%). However, more than 85% of the students, no matter what the school policy, agree that all faculty in the school should be rated by their students concerning their teaching quality.

Who should be the rater? Item 35 addresses who should be the rater. In the required students, 40.3% hold that current students are qualified to be raters, 18.3% hold for previous semester students, and 25.8% hold for both current and previous semester students. Like the required students, the three relatively high-percentage categories are current students (30.1%), "current and previous semester students (27.4%)", and "previous semester students (24.3%)" for the optional students. However, there exists statistically significant disagreement in opinion between required and optional students over this issue. The percentage of required students standing with that current students should be raters is much higher than that of optional students. One of the reasons that required students are more favorable toward current students is because of the impact on the policy.

Who should be responsible to develop the evaluation form? As Table 4 indicates, there is no statistically significant difference in opinion between the required students and optional students on this issue. Faculty evaluation committee is the first choice for the required students (37.5%) and optional students (42.9%), student autonomy committee is the second choice for the required students (33.6%) and optional students (33.6%).

How should the evaluation form be designed? On the issue of the evaluation form design, 48.1% of the required students agree with a department-wide form, 34.3% prefer a college-wide form, only 17.7% agree with several options for them to pick one. Similarly, most of the optional students (55.6%) agree with a department-wide form and 29.6% agree with a college-wide form. There is no statistically difference in opinion between the required students and optional students on this issue.

When does the evaluation process take place? Required students opinion holds fairly firm (62.1%) that the end of the semester is the best time to obtain the student ratings. Like the required students, the majority of optional students (64.4%) think the student ratings process should take place at the end of the semester. It is obvious that both groups regard student ratings as summative evaluation rather than formative evaluation.

Where does the evaluation process take place? Item 39 addresses the place where the evaluation process takes place. As Table 4 indicates, 49.7 of required students think student ratings should be held in the classroom, and 43.3% of optional students feel the same. There is no statistically significant difference between the required student's opinion and the optional student's opinion on this issue. It is noticed that about one fourth of students believe that student ratings should be done on the computer network no matter what school policy is.

Who should take charge of the evaluation process if it is held in the classroom? More than 70% of required students hold the opinion that a classroom chairman should be in charge of distributing and collecting evaluation forms. Similarly, 72.0% of optional students believe that a classroom chairman should be the person to take care of the

evaluation process. There is no statistically difference in opinion between the required students and optional students on this issue.

Table 4. The Summary of χ^2 Test for Student in Required Policy and Student in Optional Policy Regarding to Perceptions of Student Ratings (Based on Items 34 to 40) ($N_{required}$ = 479, $N_{optional}$ = 402)

Item #	Item Content	Required *N* (%)	Optional *N* (%)	χ^2
34	**Who should be rated?**			
	All faculty	445(92.9)	342(85.1)	14.508**
	Particular faculty (for promotion)	22(4.6)	43(10.7)	
	Option to faculty	12(2.5)	17(4.2)	
35	**Who should be the raters?**			
	Current students	189(40.3)	124(30.1)	13.863*
	Previous-semester students	86(18.3)	100(24.3)	
	Alumni	7(1.5)	12(2.9)	
	Current and previous-semester students	121(25.8)	113(27.4)	
	Current students and alumni	5(1.1)	13(1.9)	
	Previous-semester students and alumni	14(3.0)	8(3.6)	
	All of them	47(10.0)	15(9.7)	
36	**Who should be responsible to develop the evaluation form?**			
	Academic affair office	32(7.0)	22(5.7)	3.860
	Department	100(21.9)	69(17.8)	
	Faculty evaluation committee	171(37.5)	166(42.9)	
	Student autonomy committee	153(33.6)	130(33.6)	
37	**How should the evaluation form be designed?**			
	College-wide	159(34.3)	118(29.6)	4.955
	Department-wide	223(48.1)	222(55.6)	
	Several options for faculty to pick one	82(17.7)	59(14.8)	
38	**When does the evaluation process take place?**			
	The beginning of semester	15(3.2)	14(3.5)	4.089
	The middle of semester	78(16.6)	49(12.2)	
	The end of semester	292(62.1)	259(64.4)	
	The beginning and end of semester	13(2.8)	15(3.7)	
	The middle and end of semester	65(13.8)	57(14.2)	
	All three sections	7(1.5)	8(2.0)	
39	**Where does the evaluation process take place?**			
	In the classroom	235(49.7)	177(43.3)	4.005
	No limitation	134(28.3)	124(30.3)	
	On the net	104(22.0)	108(26.4)	
40	**Who should take charge of the evaluation process if it is held in the classroom?**			
	Instructor	18(3.8)	23(5.7)	1.853
	Teaching assistant	59(12.4)	48(11.8)	
	School officer	54(11.3)	43(10.6)	
	Class chairman	346(72.5)	293(72.0)	

*$p < .05$;**$p < .01$

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether there is any relationship between school policy and students' perceptions of student ratings. For the first five issues of student ratings (as shown in Table 2), some perceptions between the required students and optional students are statistically significant different, while some of them are not. The significant parts include the purposes, concerns, components, and negative effects of student ratings. There is no statistical mean difference on the application of ratings across two groups. The findings show that students have strong preferences for the purposes of student ratings and these preferences are remarkably consistent across two groups. Nevertheless, the optional students agree more the purposes of student ratings in improving teaching, providing a chance for democracy practice for instructor and students, enhancing the communication between instructor and student, reflecting teaching effectiveness, and providing a chance for teacher self-evaluation.

The required students feel more satisfied than the optional students about that professors and administrators care about the student ratings. However, the optional students feel more satisfied than the required students about that students care about the student ratings. The only item of negative effect of student ratings which both groups agree is that good teaching may not be indicated or reflected from the ratings. The rest of items for this issue are neutral and not significant different between the required groups and optional students.

Both required students and optional students in teachers colleges have generally positive perceptions of the process of student ratings. No matter what kind of school policy is, students agree with the following: (1) all instructors should accept the student ratings,

(2) the current students should be the raters, (3) faculty evaluation committees should be responsible for developing the evaluation form, (4) instead of a college-wide evaluation form, a department-wide evaluation form should be used for student ratings, (5) the best time to implement student ratings is at the end of the semester, (6) the evaluation process may take place in the classroom, and (7) the classroom chairman should be the person to take charge of the evaluation.

Overall, this study provides a baseline for investigating the relationship between school policy and student perceptions of student ratings in teachers colleges in Taiwan. It suggests that school policy does not affect students' belief in that students have the right to evaluate teacher teaching performance. This increases confidence in the continued use of student ratings. However, school policy does make a difference in student perceptions of student ratings on their purposes, concerns, negative effect, accuracy, and procedures. This gives some warnings for school administrators in implementing student ratings.

Longitudinal data may provide more details related to the following important questions: Why do students in optional policy feel more positively than those of required policy on some purposes of student ratings? Why are students in optional policy more likely to think that student will express what they really think about the class? Do the students in optional policy rate their instructors higher than those in required policy? These are student ratings issues for future study.

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